

# the ACTION reporter

American Council To Improve Our Neighborhoods

Volume II, No. 6

March, 1958

## Experts To Advise At 8-State Dallas Clinic



ALL ROADS-TO-RENEWAL  
LEAD TO DALLAS

### Utility Business Managers Focus on Renewal

An all-day ACTION orientation program on the major aspects of urban renewal—including conservation of good areas via "good community housekeeping"—was held March 13 in Berlin, Connecticut, under the auspices of The Connecticut Light and Power Company.

The meeting marked the first time a private utility has exposed its entire management personnel to the ACTION program, and was another part of ACTION's continuing liaison program with business and industry.

#### Shuns A Luxury

Sherman R. Krupp, Connecticut Light and Power Company president, set the pace of the meeting by declaring that obsolete and worn-out neighborhoods are a "luxury no city or town can afford."

Business district managers of the power company, whose work brings them into 159 Connecticut communities, were told by urban renewal experts how good areas have been kept up, how rehabilitation of declining areas has saved them from slipping into slums, and how redevelopment of completely worn-down areas that cannot be economically justified has given them new life.

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### BUILDING INDUSTRY CONGRESS ATTRACTS WIDE PARTICIPATION

From Portland, Me., to Mobile, Ala., from little towns and big cities, career representatives to the Building Industry Congress on Urban Renewal on March 17-18.

Two hundred and fifty builders, realtors, plumbers, lumbermen, editors, civic workers, heating experts, housing economists and heating and cooling experts—the list of skills represented could go on—attended the Washington, D.C., meeting which was co-sponsored by the National Housing Center and ACTION. Richard G. Hughes, president of the Center board and an ACTION director, presided as chairman of the Congress.

Congress attention focused on "The Urban Renewal Project Exchange." ACTION arranged the Exchange to bring together private building and financial sources, with local public agencies possessing cleared land for redevelopment and plans for its use.

Actual plans and projects were displayed and discussed by the builders and the local public agencies.

### Southwest Meeting May 5-6 Stresses Workshop Program

Thirty national experts will conduct an intensive workshop program at ACTION's sixth regional urban renewal clinic in Dallas, May 5-6.

Representatives from 200 cities in eight southwestern states have been invited to the clinic which will throw the spotlight on two key areas of urban renewal:

- How to "teal-up" and get started locally.
- How to finance and expedite renewal after it has been started.

The experts will concentrate on answering practical questions in ten workshops. Clinic delegates will be able to telescope expert counseling within a two-day period that would otherwise take more time and money.

#### Major Talks Skated

Three national leaders will make major addresses. Chairman of the local arrangements committee is Stanley Marcus, Dallas civic leader, president of Neiman-Marcus, and a member of ACTION's board of directors.

Mr. Granville Moore, vice president and general manager of the Greater Dallas Planning Council, is coordinating clinic details between the council and ACTION.

A roll call of states that will be invited to send business, professional, civic and governmental leaders to the meeting includes:

Arkansas, Colorado, Kansas, Louisiana, Missouri, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas.

Communities are being urged to send leadership teams. Experience has shown that communities sending five or more delegates can get much more out of clinics because they can cover many workshops.

#### Renewal Exhibit

The practical tone of the clinic will be apparent to delegates from the moment they enter the conference building—

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## In Brief

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For more information on this, write to Mr. H. Gordon Sweet, Citizens Action Commission, 177 Church St., New Haven, Conn.

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Toledo, Ohio—Positive effects continue to be felt from a December meeting of realtors and bankers sponsored by the Toledo-Lucas County Plan Commissioners. The meeting served as a clearinghouse where much-needed information on FHA financing was exchanged.

Note from the ACTION Group Correspondent:

"... it was obvious that those attending knew very little about the opportunities offered under this financing. It occurs to me that such sessions should be held in every city with a Workable Program."

For details on the meeting, write to Mr. Walter B. Schilling, Chief Planner, Toledo-Lucas County Plan Commissioners, 445 Huron Street, Toledo 4, Ohio.

Charles J. Lyons, president of the National Association of Mutual Savings Banks and president of the Society for Savings in Hartford, told the Mortgage Bankers Association convention in Dallas:

"... I am urging the savings banks strongly to participate actively in programs of urban rehabilitation and redevelopment. . . . Enlightened self-interest, as well as public-spirited interest in the welfare of our nation, demands that we all do our share."

## ORGANIZATIONS IN RENEWAL

*Below is a statement by a national organization whose activities bear on urban renewal. The group's program, aims and resources available to local groups working for neighborhood and community improvement are outlined.*

**The American Planning and Civic Association** is a national citizens organization which since 1897 has been dedicated to educating the American people to an understanding and appreciation of: local, state, regional and national planning for the best use of urban and rural land, and of water and other natural resources. It also promotes understanding of the safeguarding and planned use of local and national parks, the wise management of national and state forests, the conservation of natural scenery, the improvement of living conditions and the fostering of wider educational facilities in schools and colleges in the fields of planning and conservation.

The group played a major part in the institution of scores of park systems, and in the public education which led to the U.S.-Canadian Treaty on Niagara Falls, based on the Burton Act. It also was involved in the nearly ten years of agitation and public education which led to the passage of the National Park Service Act of 1916. It worked for the adoption of Federal Acts in 1924 and 1926 creating the National Park and Planning Commission and backed a 1930 Act implementing the purchase of parks for the national capital region. It supported the Shipstead-Luce Act of 1930 providing for architectural control of private buildings facing public buildings and grounds.

The Association was represented on the Advisory Commission set up in 1920 by the Department of Commerce which later

issued authoritative bulletins on Planning and Zoning. In the following years the group visited hundreds of towns and cities to inspire the creation of planning commissions and comprehensive park systems.

The American Planning and Civic Association provides its members with a legislative watch and informational service, sponsors an annual National Citizens Planning Conference (which this year is scheduled for September 3-5 in Philadelphia, with headquarters at the Bellevue Stratford Hotel). It motivates the important Committee of 100 on the Federal City and issues a quarterly, **PLANNING AND CIVIC COMMENT** (single copy \$1.25) and a **CIVIC ANNUAL** (single copy \$3) of each year's important accomplishments in planning and conservation. Free copies of **Citizens Organizations for Planning** and the **ABC's of Urban Renewal** will be mailed upon request.

The Association acts as Secretariat for the National Conference on State Parks, gives limited services to the American Society of Landscape Architects out of its Washington office, and has taken active part in ACTION's Urban Renewal Clinics. It supports all programs for sound community planning and effective conservation.

For further information write: Information and Educational Service, American Planning and Civic Association, 901 Union Trust Building, Washington 5, D.C.

## FIGHT BLIGHT FUND GIVES \$\$, ADVICE

Baltimore, Md.—An interim report from Baltimore's dynamic "Fight-Blight Fund, Inc." indicates that owner-occupants of sub-standard buildings more often than not need advice instead of dollars.

The report, covering the first 11 months of 1957, points out that guidance cleared up 90 percent of the problems faced by financially-distressed owners who had building code violations on their hands.

Over 4½ years, counselling solved 80 percent of such problems with fund assistance accounting for the remainder.

The report shows that 153 firms contributed a total of \$14,000 last year to spur urban renewal. The fund had to assist five cases—at a net cost of \$2,013—while 16 Fund-counseled cases financed themselves at a combined cost of \$4,654.

Surveys conducted during the group's existence indicate that one out of twenty owner-occupants of sub-standard dwell-

ings need advice or dollar aid. The amount of money to be used for home improvements for these particular distressed property owners is \$2,000,000—not a great sum compared to the total amount of money Baltimore will spend in improvements, but officials of the Fight-Blight Fund regard this facet as the Achilles heel of the program.

"All of these funds," says the report, "have come from private sources and indicate clearly that 'urban renewal' efforts can be spurred by private initiative."

Fund members include ACTION directors James W. Rosse and Guy T. O. Holbyday. The latter is also vice chairman of ACTION's education program.

A report from ACTION describing the "Fight-Blight Fund, Inc." is available for 25¢. For further information on the fund, write to: William A. Andrews, Counsel, "Fight-Blight Fund, Inc." 306 North Charles St., Baltimore 1, Md.

# Team Inspections Bring Quick Results For Hyde Park-Kenwood Community Program

## New Building Code Plus Teams Effective

The Hyde Park-Kenwood Community Conference, covering a large area of Chicago's South Side, reports dramatic results in the use of inspection "teams" to crack down on serious building code violators.

Like most cities, Chicago has been troubled with the problem of code enforcement. Single inspectors would make separate investigations in a building under scrutiny and each report would be processed apart from the others and at different times.

"The result was that a judge never saw the complete picture on a building," the Conference pointed out in its annual report. **James B. Cunningham** is executive director of the group.

### Stronger Code

Last year, with a new, stronger building code in effect, the Conference decided to improve enforcement procedure.

Representatives went to Mayor Daley. They brought an idea for "team" inspections, and facts and figures to back up their case.

Figures for 1956 showed that out of 149 inspections on 121 area buildings, only a total of \$1,545 in fines were levied in 38 cases. And blight was spreading.

The Conference idea—send six inspectors and a prosecutor into a building at one time. If hazardous violations are found, the case goes directly to court strengthened by the impact of multiple testimony.

The Mayor liked the idea and soon seven temporary teams were functioning. The results were impressive. With courts levying fines up to \$200 for each day violations continued, a total of \$51,000 in fines were collected in 64 cases with each fine nearly 20 times stiffer, on the average, than under the old single-complaint system.

### Violations Corrected

But record fines were not the objective of the Conference. Neighborhood improvement was, and results were heartening. The Conference noted that violations in team-inspected buildings were corrected before suits came to trial in all but a few cases.

"A new climate of strict enforcement has been created," according to the Conference. "Many buildings have been fixed up without being inspected. And the new firmness has carried over to ordinary cases."

The Conference, with nearly 3,800 members and a yearly budget exceeding \$60,000, has a volunteer Legal Panel to which residents may first direct complaints before going to city agencies.

### Voluntary Settlements

During 1957, the panel handled 329 cases and obtained voluntary settlements in 158 of them. The others had to be referred to the Building Department and appropriate city agencies. With the worst buildings largely cleaned up via team inspectors, the panel looks for an increase in settlements by voluntary means of less serious complaints.

Here is how a well-directed program can stimulate citizen participation. Sam Bell, a service station owner in the Hyde Park-Kenwood area, told the annual meeting of the Conference:

"I am a strong supporter of urban renewal even though the present plans call for knocking me off my corner. If that happens I hope to find another location and stay here for a long time."

### Permanent Teams

The story of the Hyde Park-Kenwood group has an ending which shows that intelligent conservation ideas can spread faster than blight:

Mayor Daley was so impressed by the work of teams in the Conference area that he ordered creation of 12 permanent teams for use throughout the city.

Copies of the annual report are available from Mr. Cunningham, 1305-07 East 53rd Street, Chicago 15, Illinois.

Available from ACTION—and one of its most popular reports—is "Organization of Block Groups for Neighborhood Improvement: The Hyde Park-Kenwood Community Conference."

## Urban Renewal Sunday Marked in Decatur, Ill.

The old axiom that Cleanliness is next to Godliness was given an urban renewal interpretation in Decatur, Ill., last month.

Representatives of all major religions took part in "Urban Renewal Sunday." The city-wide, cooperative project took on television to bring its plea for urban betterment before the people of Decatur.

A panel show was held on station WTVP, E. W. Bickford, chairman of the Urban Renewal Committee—Association of Commerce group sponsoring the event—sounded the key note when he said:

"We, who share in the good life of the city, have a moral responsibility to see



The place: a rubbish-littered vacant lot off a busy street in Chicago's uptown North Side. Children played in this lot (top), and if not there, in the street and on the sidewalks. The Uptown Chicago Commission, the neighborhood conservation group, helped area residents organize themselves for action. Community groups offered help. One church leased the land from the estate executor for the nominal sum of \$1 a year. The owner put up a fence. Men on the block removed 19 tons of rubble. Women held a series of fund-raising parties. Business and veterans' groups contributed labor and playground equipment. The result (bottom) in the plus column—one safe, clean playlot for children; in the minus column—one eyesore.

that there is a minimum living standard for our neighbors. We must pass on to our children a city in which living conditions are at least as good as those we have known."

The Rev. A. E. C. Pentland, St. Paul's Methodist Church, said that "... the churches have a stake in urban renewal—even if they have a stake in the moral life of our community."

For further information on how Decatur organized its "Urban Renewal Sunday," write to the Association of Commerce, Decatur Club Building, Decatur, Ill.

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